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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [CJAN](#) [SNAR](#) [ASEC](#) [KJUS](#) [VZ](#) [CO](#) [AR](#)  
SUBJECT: FM TAIANA OFFERS INSIGHTS INTO COLOMBIAN HOSTAGE RELEASE

REF: A. BUENOS AIRES 0013  
[1B](#). BUENOS AIRES 0006  
[1C](#). 07 BUENOS AIRES 2391 AND PREVIOUS  
[1D](#). 07 BOGOTA 8723  
[1E](#). 07 CARACAS 2410

Classified By: AMBASSADOR E. ANTHONY WAYNE FOR  
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[¶1.](#) (C) Summary. During a January 10 meeting with Ambassador Wayne, Foreign Minister Jorge Taiana offered his assessment of the release of FARC hostages in Colombia. He expressed appreciation for the USG's public statement praising the release of the hostages. Taiana also praised Colombian President Uribe, saying he acted in good faith, despite Hugo Chavez's failed first attempt to secure the hostages, release in December 2007. Taiana maintained that the committee of international observers (which included himself and former President and First Gentleman Nestor Kirchner) helped to secure the hostages' ultimate release. He also speculated that the FARC's unilateral hostage release demonstrates that it is not necessary for the GOC to give in to the FARC's demands to relinquish control over two municipalities in order to free hostages.

[¶2.](#) (C) Also on January 10, President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK) publicly praised the humanitarian mission that sought the hostages, release and criticized Argentina's leading dailies, La Nacion and Clarin, for ridiculing Argentina's role in the operation. Both papers seem to have been chastened, at least temporarily, by CFK's remarks, leaving the continued criticism to papers with smaller circulation, which noted that the hostage release took place without Argentina, Kirchner, and the media spectacle Chavez orchestrated in December. End Summary.

[¶3.](#) (C) On January 10, Foreign Minister Jorge Taiana offered his assessment of the release of FARC hostages in Colombia during a meeting with Ambassador Wayne. The meeting covered a variety of topics including the current state of bilateral relations in the aftermath of the Miami arrests in the valijagate scandal, Kosovo, the Damascus Declaration National Council, and U.S. companies' concerns over Argentina's investment climate (reported septels.) Taiana was accompanied by Under Secretary for Bilateral Relations Vicente Espeche Gil.

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Uribe Acted in Good Faith Despite Reservations  
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[¶4.](#) (C) Taiana began by recounting his earlier phone conversation with Colombia Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo, who called to thank Argentina for its help in securing the hostages' release. Taiana also expressed appreciation for, and handed the Ambassador a copy of, the

USG's public statement praising the FARC's release of the hostages. Praising Colombian President Uribe and Restrepo, Taiana stated that both had acted in good faith, despite rational concerns over the "very Caribbean" Hugo Chavez's previous failed attempt to secure the release. Taiana called the FARC "tricksters" (trampozos), and that a combination of sheer luck and pressure enabled this latest effort to succeed.

¶5. (C) Taiana stated that it was obvious now that the FARC had called off the previous hostage release because they no longer held the boy, Emmanuel Rojas, in captivity. He also suggested that Colombian military operations in FARC-controlled areas may have contributed to the delayed hostage release. He maintained that the committee of international observers that had participated in the first attempt to release the hostages helped to secure the hostages' ultimate release. He also speculated that the FARC's unilateral hostage release demonstrates that it is not necessary for the GOC to give in to the FARC's demands to relinquish control over two municipalities in order to free hostages.

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Yolanda Betancourt Fears Colombian Military Rescue Operation  
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¶6. (C) Referring to the botched June 2007 military attempt to rescue 12 Congressmen held hostage by the FARC which resulted in the deaths of 11, Taiana asserted that neither he, nor President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, believe in military attempts to free hostages. He recalled a recent conversation he had with Yolanda Betancourt when he was in Colombia as part of a group of international observers invited to serve as guarantors of the hostage release in December. Betancourt, the mother of Colombian hostage Ingrid

Betancourt, had confided to him that her biggest fear was that Uribe would authorize a military operation to rescue her daughter that may ultimately result in her death. (Note: Taiana knows Yolanda Betancourt from their days when both were Ambassadors to Guatemala in the 1990s.) Taana stated that CFK is very committed to freeing Ingrid Betancourt and will continue to work toward that end.

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GOC has Never Asserted Full Territorial Control  
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¶7. (C) Taiana told the Ambassador that he has visited Colombia a dozen times as a member of human rights observation missions. He asserted that the Colombian government has never been able to fully assert control over its territory, and that the rivalry between its three largest cities, Bogota, Medellin, and Cali, has in the past paralyzed the government's ability to develop institutions that respect the command of the national government.

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CFK Praises Humanitarian Mission, Criticizes Press  
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¶8. (SBU) On January 10, CFK publicly praised the humanitarian mission that sought the hostages, release and criticized (without naming) the two principal analysts of Argentina's leading dailies, La Nacion and Clarin. Responding to an earlier editorial from Clarin asserting that CFK had "paid a high political cost for her non-critical relationship with Chavez," she stated that when it comes to humanitarian actions and the defense of human rights, Argentina would act, "without measuring the political costs." She stressed that "the mission was worth it" and reiterated her administration's commitment to working towards the release of Ingrid Betancourt and all other hostages. She added that for those "militants who do not like President Chavez's policies," it is "ultimately up to the people of Venezuela to evaluate in free and democratic elections in their own country....(W)e, however, recognize (Chavez) as a friend of Argentina's."

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Taiana Stresses International Mission's Role in Release  
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¶9. (SBU) The press also quoted FM Taiana as saying that the hostages' release proved that the gathering of international observers in the first failed attempt in December was "not futile" because it raised the stakes to a point "where the parties could not back out." Taiana also asserted that the mission had helped to raise the international profile of the issue. While admitting that "it is not easy to understand the FARC's logic,<sup>8</sup> Taiana told the press that the actual release of the two hostages must be used as an opportunity "to create the political space to negotiate for the release of all other hostages."

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COMMENT  
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¶10. (C) Taiana seemed genuinely pleased with the outcome of the Colombian hostage situation. After the local press had ridiculed President and First Gentleman Nestor Kirchner's participation in the failed December attempt to secure the hostages' release (see ref A), Taiana seemed eager to portray the January release as a success for the international observer mission. La Nacion and Clarin seem to have been chastened, at least temporarily, by CFK's remarks yesterday, leaving the continued criticism to papers with smaller circulation, such as Ambito Financiero which noted that the hostage release took place without Argentina, Kirchner, and the media spectacle Chavez orchestrated in December.

¶11. (C) At the end of the meeting, Taiana told the Ambassador that he was "exhausted" from this and other activity, but foresaw no break until March. He said that he would soon be traveling to Spain for the Alliance of Civilizations Conference and noted that CFK would not be attending. Despite media speculation to the contrary, he explained that CFK never had plans to travel to Spain in the first few months of her tenure.

WAYNE